

SOME GUARANTEES FOR THE PROTESTANT AND UNIONIST MINORITY.

By John O'Leary.

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I begin by confessing that I feel somewhat ashamed that any class of my countrymen should feel the necessity of any guarantees, moral or material, against spoliation or persecution in a free Ireland. But, unfortunately, many Irishmen, and many whom I have no sufficient reason for thinking other than good men and good Irishmen, do feel the necessity, and I naturally wish to do my little best to show them that their fears are groundless, or at worst resting on very insufficient grounds.

The first guarantees Protestants have, and one which they certainly do not underrate, is their own strong hands and stout hearts. They are over a million in a population of less than five millions. They have nearly all the wealth, far the larger share of the culture, and they imagine, fondly and perhaps fairly, that they have more than a proportionate share of the intelligence of the country. All these things combined may not be adequate guarantees against oppression, but they are at least very strong barriers in its way; they cannot absolutely bear down a brutal majority, but they must at the worst make it pause and hesitate, unless it be at the same time an utterly stupid and senseless one.

But now let us look at the other side of the picture. Who and what are these terrible Papists? How has their attitude or action in the past given any reasonable ground for apprehension in the future? Protestants with minds open to conviction can find out from the pages of the Protestant historian, Lecky. This is a bare glance at the moral side of the question, but what about the purely material, or, if you wish to put it so, the arithmetical aspect of the case? There are Catholics and Catholics. We do not care to shock the sensibilities of some of our

Protestant as well as Catholic brethren, by dwelling upon the self-evident fact that many of the so-called Catholics, here as elsewhere, are only Catholics in the sense that they do not profess themselves Protestants of any definite persuasion, but are in point of fact, either broad, or, if you like it better, loose Protestants or freethinkers of very varying hue and dye. Orthodox people in Ireland, whether Catholic or Protestant, do not like to fact this fact, but surely all facts will force their way into notice in the long run, and whatever evil and ugly look this fact may bear on the surface, it has at least one good side to it, which happens to be an all-important one in the present connection. Most assuredly, whatever freethinkers may or may not do, they will not aid Catholics in persecuting Protestants. Many Protestants will think that the numerical support from this section of the community may not be great, and I sincerely hope it is not so large as it looks to me; but, be it big or small, its help is at least sure and safe. Let us turn now to the Catholics proper. Are there not many of them—how many it is naturally hard to say—of whom, as Catholics, you cannot safely assume anything at all, save that they hold, with more or less definiteness and tenacity, the doctrines of their Church? Lumping together all these Catholics, real and reputed, and adding them on to the Protestants proper, surely it would be no exaggeration to say that we are pretty certain to arrive at as high a figure as two millions, or possibly even two-and-a-half. But taking the lowest figures, we have now two millions to oppose to three, and two millions with all the moral advantages at least on their side. You have most of these men as it were fighting for their own hand, and all fighting from conviction.

Now what have we on the other side? We have possibly three millions, but how composed? There are, as Protestants think, first and worst a dominant priesthood and a more or less ignorant and obedient mass of followers. This is to my mind a bare possibility; but, no doubt, it will look to the inflamed eyes of many Protestants not only a probable contingency, but an actual fact. I write of course for Protestants, but I do not hope to produce any effect upon utterly unreasoning or unreasonable ones, and I think most Protestants who do not fall into this category will be prepared to grant that, however it may be with the priests, or the guiding spirits among them, the mass

of their followers will be influenced by very different and diverse motives, and their actions cannot be counted on with any degree of certainty. When the priests set themselves against the cherished feelings or the higher aspirations of the people, they are simply powerless, as was clearly enough shown in the Fenian times. Now the masses, as distinguished from the classes, if once the Land question were settled and a Parliament sitting in College Green, need not necessarily have any strong sympathy with specially clerical views. They dislike Protestants now, partly because most of the landlords are Protestants, but mainly I think, because most of the Protestants are West-British. Take away the cause and you will take away the effect. England is, in my opinion, resolved to settle the Land question, and possibly in a more radical way than I would at all like. But it little matters what I or any man likes, and the landlords, if they were wise—which, I fear, they mostly are not—would face this fact, or rather face it in time; would first take what they can get, while they can get something like the value of their properties; and, secondly, accept their purchase money or reduced rents with as little friction with the people as possible. This is of course all more or less episodal, though a very vital part of the general subject, and is merely introduced here to show that as landlordism, at least in its aggravated shape, is about to disappear, Protestants cannot continue to be disliked because landlords formed part of their body.

We come then to the second cause of dislike, which is, unfortunately, becoming aggravated of late; but certainly this is from no fault of the Catholic masses. The landlords, Catholic and Protestant, are fighting for England, or rather for the English Unionists, in the vain hope of keeping their properties intact. But once let us have Home Rule, and West-Britonism will cease, for West-Britonism will have lost its *raison d'être*, and, as a necessary result, in a short time all animosities based on that fugitive entity will vanish. In all this I do not in the least seek to ignore any danger that may exist, and I at once frankly acknowledge that in Ireland, as elsewhere, the question of education is likely to become a bone of contention. Here priests and people are as one, for the people, having no definite ideas on the subject and no strong feeling one way or the other, are

naturally prepared to follow the lead of the clergy, who have definite ideas on the matter, and still more certainly strong feelings. I have been told indeed of late that Protestants and Catholics are now substantially agreed in favour of denominational education, but I do not believe this; however, granting it were true for the moment, divergencies and controversies are sure to arise hereafter, and we will have to fight the matter out here as it has been (and is still being) fought out in Belgium and elsewhere.

And here I am reminded that the history of Belgium since its separation from Holland ought to show our Protestant and Unionist brothers that numbers are far from being an infallible test of policy, unless one could omnisciently enter into the shifting minds that make up the numbers. The proportion of Protestants to Catholics is roughly somewhat the same in Belgium as in Ireland, yet the Liberal party (roughly speaking again, for there is no present necessity for looking up the statistics), which is there opposed to the Catholic party, has ruled the country for more than half the time since the Revolution of 1830. Here names are certainly deceptive, for presumably there are Protestants (unless we assume all Protestants in Belgium to be Liberals) in the Catholic party, while the Liberal party must be in the main composed of Catholics of some sort or other. I take the case of Belgium simply *en parenthèse*, as being as near an analogy to our own state as could well be afforded or even imagined. I do not enter into details, for most educated men know something of the subject, and all can easily make themselves acquainted with it. Of course I am aware that religion, directly or indirectly, plays a great part in Belgium politics, as it may here; but Belgium makes it plain to demonstration that, in our modern societies, you can draw no definite lines between Protestants and Catholics, at least the Protestants and Catholics of the census papers.

I have only proposed to give some guarantees to Protestants, and I am quite conscious that many Protestants may think those I have mentioned but few and inadequate; but I am at least equally conscious that if time and circumstances permitted, I could easily fill the number of the REVIEW with facts and figures which, if they did not convince Protestants, at least ought to convince such of them as

are not stone-blind or stone-deaf to all argument. But *cui bono*? I have dwelt mainly on material considerations, though I put far greater faith in moral ones, and I am far more concerned to move the hearts of any section of my fellow-countrymen than merely to affect their heads.

While men are merely thinking of their material well-being there will be always room for controversy. But man lives not only by bread alone, and surely it is only to the soul of the slave that there can ever be any question as to whether it is better to be safe and in bondage, or to be free and in danger. Trust begets trust, and when Protestants cease to fear, either for their purses or their skins, they will have advanced far on the road to safety. The root of the whole matter lies in the very simple fact that we *are* all Irishmen, and that we *should* all strive to become 'kindly Irish of the Irish, neither Saxon nor Italian.' This land is ours, from the centre to the sea, and as much, however rogues or fools may gabble, the land of a Protestant and a landlord as of a Catholic and a farmer. It is not *de jure*, however it may be *de facto*, the land of Englishmen or Scotchmen. And it is one of the saddest of sights that, when Englishmen and Scotchmen seem to see the wisdom of loosening our fetters, many Irishmen should still be found willing to hug their chains. Can they not at last learn the lesson so long since taught alike to Celt and Saxon by one whom Lord Justice Fitzgibbon some weeks ago pronounced to be our purest souled poet—the Protestant Thomas Davis—

We have no curse for you or yours
But Friendship's ready grasp,
And Faith to stand by you and yours
Unto our latest gasp--
To stand by you against all foes,
Howe'er, or whence, they come,
With traitor arts, or bribes, or blows,
From England, France, or Rome.

What matter that at different shrines
We pray unto one God--
What matter that at different times
Our fathers won this sod,
In fortune and in name we're bound
By stronger links than steel;

And neither can be safe or sound
But in the other's weal.

JOHN O'LEARY.